

Suggested guidelines regarding natural and naturalisable areas

Montreal Metropolitan land use and development plan

and the revision and updating of the
Montreal Master Urban Plan
and the local city and borough urban plans for the greater Montreal region.

Preparing for the Montreal Metropolitan land use and development plan and for the City master plans

Over the next two years, with the coming into force of Bill 58, we will be entering the consultation phase that will lead to the adoption of the first land use and development plan of the Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC). At the same time, there will be revisions and updates of the urban plans for the local cities and boroughs of the MMC. These guidelines are being proposed by citizens and groups who want to integrate the notions of protection of natural spaces in the land use plans and programs of the MMC.

Possibly for the first time ever in Quebec, Bill 58 includes the *protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment, and of landscapes* (article 2.24) as part of the considerations for the land use and development plan. This means that we now have a unique opportunity to create clear guidelines in regards to protecting and enhancing the natural environment. These guidelines will, as a result, have a huge impact since they will determine how all cities in the MMC deal with natural areas for years to come.

For further elaboration on this process and the purpose of these guidelines we refer you to the document annexed presenting a series of Tools designed to help better understand the issues. Included in these tool boxes is information pertinent to the various recommendations. They cover the most important elements you need to know in order to promote the policies objectives and criteria which will protect natural areas.

See Tool 1: A brief overview of the importance of natural areas and Tool 2: Why also include naturalisable areas

These guidelines are supported by:

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Eight (8) basic policy directions, objectives and criteria

Article 2.24 of Bill 58, identifies eight (8) key areas which must be developed in the Metropolitan land use and development plan; therefore the guidelines we will propose will be regrouped and linked to these key headings as defined in the law.

1. Land transportation planning

- A **'mega' greenway network composed of a greenbelt, a blue belt and a series of interconnecting greenways** must be included as part of the MMC transportation infrastructure. This 'mega' greenway network must link as many parts of the MMC as possible for active transportation as well as create corridors leading to the communities neighbouring the MMC. It must however always be remembered that a 'mega' greenway network for the MMC should also play an essential role for protecting and increasing biodiversity. For further details please see **Tool 3: What is a 'mega' greenway network.**

2. The protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment, and of landscapes

A priority element with four key policy directions to consider:

- **Establish a goal of at least 17% of the surface area of the MMC to be protected as natural or naturalized lands with natural areas in all cities of the MMC:** Protecting natural and naturalized areas should be a priority. Many other cities and countries have far exceeded the previous 12% international minimum standard set by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature). As of October 2010, the **Convention on Biological Diversity** set a new target of 17% of terrestrial lands. As a result, the MMC should now aim to reach the new goal of attaining a minimum of 17% of lands protected. One important aspect however, this percentage must be measured and applied in a uniform way across the MMC. It must also be based on the international standards that the rest of the World applies namely the IUCN, not on locally determined standards which have no real bearing.
- **Ensure both natural and naturalized areas are protected.** Both natural and naturalized are necessary: Because natural areas are not accessible in equal quantities throughout the MMC, some more urban areas would have more naturalized areas than natural; these can nevertheless serve similar roles to natural areas for more urban communities.
- **Offer universal access to all residents:** All residents of the MMC should have access to natural or naturalized areas. On average all residents should be within walking distance of natural areas; within a maximum radius of 2km. This is a basic principle of environmental justice. It is particularly important that all children have easy and unstructured access to natural areas, in order for them to develop realistic and constructive attitudes towards their environment. See **Tool 4: Universal access, a basic principle of environmental justice.**
- **Biodiversity must be integrated.** This can be done through
 - the protection of key areas and
 - the creation of a **'mega' greenway network (greenbelt, blue belt and greenways) linking various key areas of ecological importance and allowing plant or animal populations to travel between them**There are various reasons for favouring biodiversity; it reduces the risks of disease and parasite attacks on plants, increases recreation and tourism, etc. In the same way, greenways forming corridors are also considered essential for biodiversity, in particular because they prevent genetic isolation which makes many plant and animal populations too small to survive. It also reduces mortality of plant and animal populations during extremes in weather.

3. The identification of any part of the territory of the metropolitan community that must be the subject of integrated land use and transportation planning

The objective set by the government in this section of law 58 is to:

- Identify and outline specific areas of urbanization where land use and transport are integrated. Once these are defined and their limits determined, the natural areas outside these defined territories must remain natural.
- Create an inventory of natural and ecologically valuable land across the MMC
- Integrate planning based on optimum land use, transport and ecosystemic value in order to give priority to development of land of less ecological value and protect land of greater ecological value.

Bearing in mind that we will have to address the preoccupations of other **proponents (see Tool 5: Dealing with competing views of social priorities)**, we will have here to propose the same five points previously mentioned in items 2 and 3 as part of an integrated management plan. This means that we should promote the creation of a process that will, within an integrated management plan:

- allow the creation of a large scale '**mega**' **greenway network** comprised of a greenbelt, a blue belt and a series of interconnected greenways
- aim to **protect natural and naturalisable areas** in all sectors of the MMC
- aim to **maximise biodiversity**
- **protect at least 17%** of the surface area of the MMC as natural or naturalised land
- **Ensure universal access to biodiversity** for all residents by insuring all cities and boroughs

4. The definition of minimum density levels according to the characteristics of the locality

Three important priorities will contribute to the protection of natural areas:

- **Maintain low to no density for natural areas and naturalisable areas** as well as potential green corridors in light of their various economic, recreational, social and biodiversity benefits (**see tool 1: the benefits of natural areas**). This will protect the existing natural habitat for urban wildlife and flora.
- **Maximize density around public transportation hubs** such as metro, train, and bus terminals, as long as this does not entail the destruction of areas of ecological importance. This will encourage the use of public transport.
- **Increase minimum densities in outlying areas** for new housing off island and further away from public transit. This will discourage urban sprawl.

5. The development of agricultural activities

57% of the Metropolitan Montreal region is composed of agricultural land and 49% of the province's agricultural and food transformation industry is in the metropolitan Montreal region. This implies the need to consider how agriculture and nature can cohabitate.

- **Protect agricultural land as part of a 'mega' greenway network**
This land can serve a strong purpose for wildlife and biodiversity and can allow wildlife to travel between natural areas. For this reason, the protection of agricultural land should be strongly associated to the previously described creation of a 'mega' greenway network.
- **Encourage local food in the 'mega' greenway network**
This is a standard for most greenbelt projects including, for example Toronto. Presently, it is estimated that our food has on average travelled 4000km before reaching our plate. This means that food is less fresh and less nutritious. It also implies there is more pollution linked to its transportation.
- **Promote the creation of windbreaks serving both agriculture and biodiversity**
A study made in Kent, Ontario, revealed that soya production increased by 28,6% when wind breaks were used. A 4m high wind break could be created in as little as 5 years. Such wind breaks could also serve as green corridors within a 'mega' greenway network.
- **Promote alternate forms of agriculture**
More and more farmers are working throughout North-America to develop alternate forms of agriculture. Farmers for example will manage forests or windbreaks that they would otherwise convert to fields in order to use them to collect, berries, nuts, mushrooms or fruits for specialty markets.

6. The definition of territories reserved for optimal urbanization

Taking into consideration that **we should first of all answer the need to protect natural AND naturalisable areas and create a 'mega' greenway network** (greenbelt, blue belt and greenways), guide lines for optimal urbanization should include:

- **Areas closest to a few key well located public transportation hubs.**
- **Serviced areas which are presently abandoned** i.e. former industrial and commercial zones.
- **Areas which can be decontaminated** (brown fields)
- **Areas which can support new development without new road infrastructure.**
- **Priority zones for green building and sustainable neighbourhoods with low carbon footprint**

7. The identification of any part of the territory of the metropolitan community that is situated within the territory of two or more regional county municipalities and is subject to significant constraints for reasons of public security, public health or general well-being

Based on the need to protect natural areas and naturalisable lands, four portions of the territory should be considered for parks and the 'mega' greenway network AND not be considered for new housing or other forms of development:

- **Natural AND naturalisable areas as well as potential sites necessary for creating essential links within a 'mega' greenway network**
This includes the greenbelt, the blue belt and greenways.
- **Floodplains (zones inondables) within the 100 year set back. (zones centennaires).**
This reduces future risks and costs of flooding and helps protect potential habitats.
- **Within 300 meters of class 3 industry and railway yards.**
This is a proposal that follows Ontario Municipal Guidelines, and applies the recommendations of both the Canadian Federation of Municipalities and the Canadian Railway Association and has been adopted by the city of Edmonton. This is an important point which could save sites such as Meadowbrook.
- **Areas which present technological or ecological risk** such as risks of contamination or pollution.

8. The identification of any facility that is of metropolitan interest, and the determination of the site, use and capacity of any new such facility

Given the previous comment and the interest for large projects protecting natural areas such as *the Parc écologique de l'Archipel project*, supported by more than 80 organisations, the facilities of metropolitan interest are:

- **Natural AND naturalisable areas** to be used **as parks** accessible to all the community. Here, it should be emphasized that it is important to protect as much as possible of what is still left within urban environments, even if the specific sites need some amount of naturalisation, because of the various benefits of natural areas.
- Potential sites necessary for creating **essential links within a 'mega' greenway network** (greenbelt, blue belt and greenways). These would be used as parks or as corridors for either active transportation or for wildlife and biodiversity